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DEMOCRATIZING SPIRITUALITY

Democracy and spirituality are much more akin than sometimes either is ready to admit. If, as we have already argued, democracy must be spiritualized, it is quite true that spirituality must be democratized.

If democracy needs Christianity, Christianity just as certainly needs democracy.



We have not inherited a democratic religion in the sense that all men are regarded as equal in point of spiritual opportunity. The doctrine of election drew a line across the human race which, we were taught to believe, if not to be seen by humanity, is so clearly seen by God that he does everything for those to the right of it and nothing for those on the left.

The enjoyment of religion has been particularly guaranteed those who have abandoned the ordinary life and have devoted themselves to what was called spiritual exercise.

Many states have been so organized that the clergy constitutes a distinct order, and even today in England the bishops have privileges which only the lords possess.

More humble religions have developed ecclesiastical organizations which make a sharp distinction between the clergy and the laity, or have thrown the control of denominations into the hands of autocratic boards.

But an even greater danger to democracy of the spirit is wealth. From the days of the letter of James to our own the possession of economic power and privilege has been consciously or unconsciously regarded as a claim to influence and even control in things spiritual.

One is not necessarily a demagogue who cries out against a spiritual plutocracy which would make ministers and theological professors hired men, force biblical teachers into certain lines by withholding the support from Young Men's Christian Associations and churches, measure spiritual efficiency by material standards, and believe that salvation consists in accepting the atoning mercy of Christ without participating in the vicarious sacrifice which he imposed upon his followers.

A church that seeks so to organize as to separate the body of Christ into groups of working-men and other groups of capitalists is a church that needs to be democratized. Life and death and immortality know nothing of privileged and unprivileged classes.

The fundamental message of Christ cannot be adapted to segregated groups. As long as there is only one gospel there can be only one class of hearers. To treat accidental distinctions as permanent is still further to subdivide an already too much divided Protestantism. Only as we realize that spirituality is generic, however different may be the form of its expression, do we really enter into the mind of Christ.

Efforts to promote a spiritual aristocracy, whatever may be its name, are aimed not at the evil which the church must overcome, but at the heart of the church itself.

Only as these followers of Jesus who claim to be spiritually minded find new sympathies, know vicarious suffering by contact with the world in which they live, can they really be said to be Christians. The only fraternity worth talking about is the fraternity that keeps a man humble, keen to recognize others' capacities, given to ministering to others' needs, ready to be saved only by being made loving.

Without this sort of spirituality Christians are but disciples too proud to wash each others' feet, waiting to be taught the lesson of democracy by their Master.